

**Testimony of Jennifer Pantaleao Rodriguez  
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With 14 Years of Classroom Experience**

*In support of*

**HB 6884 (AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF  
THE TEACHING PROFESSION)**

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My testimony today is in support of House Bill 6884 as it will provide much needed amendments that will enhance the teaching profession and learning experience in the state of Connecticut.

At dinner tables, in schools, at board meetings, on college campuses, around the state and country people are discussing education. The concerns of teacher recruitment and retention have been on our television screens, social media feeds, and on the pages of reputable news outlets. High turnover is being felt even in smaller towns like my own. Last year we lost approximately twenty-five educators. We have already met that same number as of November. This year, we have had unprecedented mid-year moves, with teachers leaving to other districts or leaving the profession altogether in the middle of the school year. As a Teacher of the Year, I am receiving more requests for letters of recommendation as educators plan to leave over the summer. My own team has expressed that they will not be returning next year. That is two veteran teachers with fourteen plus years of experience and knowledge and one brand new teacher. Colleagues and contacts across the state are reporting the same.

Recently I had the opportunity to sit on a webinar for the United States Department of Education, a round table discussion at the Connecticut State Department of Education, and host a local roundtable in Newington. The topic of all was the same: How to address recruiting, retaining, and enhancing the profession. Those who were at the table were experts in their fields. They were educators and administrators. The shared experiences, synergetic conversations, and ideas. The positive outcomes were invaluable and each person walked away feeling hopeful in the work and changes that can and should be made. House Bill 6884 addresses so many of them.

The thread that connected all three meetings, the themes that stood out over and over again, were partnerships, affordability, equitable, conditions and support.

Let's begin with partnerships:

Having all education stakeholders at the table ensures all voices are heard and all perspectives are represented. The webinars and roundtable discussions were so meaningful and hopeful because the experts were at the table. In the state of Connecticut educators are required to attain graduate level degrees. Educators are required to participate in ongoing professional development. Educators are reading, researching, and learning. Educators are at the forefront of what is actually happening in education. Educators are the boots on the ground in this ever changing world of education. Why would we not have educators at the table? In supporting Bill 6884 you are supporting Section 17 appointing two non-voting educators to the State Board of Education and Section 18 establishing a teacher advisory committee which would give educators a voice and seat at the table. Lean on us. Utilize our collective and extensive experience and backgrounds. Let us help move Connecticut forward in this post pandemic era.

Equity and affordability go hand and hand. Some say to be an educator is a calling, but it is also challenging and cost prohibitive. There are extensive tuition costs, numerous testing and certification fees. The burden of student-teaching, which is a full time job, without a stipend or payment, is all consuming. Then we begin a classroom teacher position at a wage far below other entry level positions with a degree. Only to realize that once an educator begins a contracted position, they have five years to start a graduate level degree program, required by the state of Connecticut. Educators are incurring debt upon debt. To prospective young educators, teaching does not promote fiscal prosperity or responsibility as the cost does not support the outcomes. In passing Bill 6884 you are supporting Section 4 the removal of EdTPA, Section 1 raising base salary for educators, Section 2 providing some financial relief through a tax credit for educators. By making it more affordable, we are making the profession more equitable, attainable, attractive, and valuable.

The two themes educators have not wavered on are working conditions and support. We have standardized learning expectations and outcomes across the country, yet we have not standardized the age in which a child begins their formal education. I have personally seen the disparity between students who begin at the age of four compared to their more seasoned peers who begin at the age of 5. In these young formative years a span of six

months to a year between peers in the same grade is significant. Their ability to self regulate, attend to rigorous learning, speech, fine and gross motor development are all tied to these early ages. The earlier they begin the less they have mastery over those important developmental milestones, thus resulting in significant needs for support in and outside of the classroom. This also leads to behavior, social, and emotional dysregulation that is disruptive to their own and their peers' learning. Section 10 of this bill supports changing the entry age to five years of age, which is inline with our surrounding states and across the country.

Supporting Section 11, play based learning for pre-k and kindergarten students is also imperative. Fred Rogers stated, "Play is the work of childhood". I would go a bit further, in stating, play based learning is the work of early education. In my opinion it should be extended to first grade as well. This type of learning is developmentally appropriate and provides students with opportunities to construct their learning in very concrete and hands-on ways. It is not developmentally appropriate to expect these young learners to sit quietly and read or write or explore math concepts. Play is their learning. Help to codify that with this bill. Supporting these two sections is supporting working conditions. If students are developmentally prepared for learning, we will see less dysregulation, disengagement, and less academic and emotional support needed.

Support Section 13, guaranteeing educators a minimum of 30 minutes of planning time. I teach first grade and every academic subject therein. It takes 30 minutes to prepare for just one area of instruction. My current contract only guarantees me 25 minutes a day. My district does their best to provide 45 minutes for planning in addition to that 25 minutes. Not all educators are as fortunate. That said, those 45 minutes are filled with parent correspondence, correcting work, entering data, meetings, committees and more. By supporting this bill you are guaranteeing educators a minimum of 30 minutes of uninterrupted and self guided planning, which would improve working conditions.

I could go on and on about this bill. I've highlighted sections I feel passionately about and can speak to personally. My hope is you will pass this bill in its entirety. I believe you respect the voice of the experts in the room and will do what is best for educators and learners. Thank you for your time and support of this Bill! Let's get it passed!